DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 111 031 CS 202 254

AUTHOR Billiard, Charles E.
TITLE Dialectology and the Process of Discovery in the Classroom.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on English Education (13th, Colorado Springs, March 20-22, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Dialect Studies; Higher Education; Language Usage; Linguistics; Regional Dialects; *Social Dialects; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a graduate course for language arts teachers at Georgia State University in Atlanta, titled Social Dialects and Language Learning. Classroom procedures and activities in the course were organized into five cumulative, related phases to engage the teachers in useful fieldwork in order to achieve major objectives of the course. In the first phase of the work, teachers were asked to write a linguistic autobiography. The second phase of the work aimed at expanding the teachers' awareness of phonological, lexical, and grammatical contrasts in the idiolects of members of small groups formed in classes. The third phase was the preparation for the actual fieldwork, using a questionnaire as an instrument for investigating the language usage of others. The fourth phase involved the organization and management of language data for investigating the variation of language in several dimensions. The fifth phase involved speculation about the causes of language variation in terms of historical, social, and psychological factors. It is concluded that teachers showing respect for the speech of all students in their classes may provide an excellent way of combating language prejudice by affecting the attitudes of the next generation of adults. (TS)

**********
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Charles E. Billiard

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

ED111031

# Dialectology and the Process of Discovery in the Classroom

Charles E. Billiard

The young fieldworker, a first-year English teacher, had just asked the gray-haired octagenerian a question intended to elicit a synonym for the word party. "A fiddlin' dance, a hoedown," he responded. "Whooee! if we had anythings in our feets, it 'ud come out when it started."

No doubt the old gentleman with a little handclapping encouragement would have jumped to his feet and performed a "fiddlin' dance" right there on the spot. But being academically inclined, she proceeded to the next item on the dialect questionnaire. Later in her Social Dialects and Language Learning class, she recalled the delightful incident as illuminating the meaning of the terse description of dialectology used by McDavid in the title of his article "Dialectology: Where Linguistics Meets the People" (McDavid, 1967).

For teachers and students working together, the study of regional and social dialects offers many opportunities to open the classroom to the outside world and to meet people in friendly, personal situations. Through fieldwork in dialectology students can discover ways in which language both promotes and destroys human understanding. Exploration of dialects, followed by the careful analysis of data, will often reveal principles of language useful to the teacher in battling language prejudices in the classroom and community. Of even greater importance in the encounter of the fieldworker with the informant is the strong probability of the interviewer discovering the humanity of another individual, whatever his dialect and other idiosyncracies.

CS 202 254

Futhermore, few disciplines, to the extent offered by dialectology, encourage students and teachers to immerse themselves in basic and applied research, in theoretical speculation and practical application, in a synthesis of subject matter ranging across such fields as geography, history, sociology, psychology, linguistics, and literature. If there exist fail-safe subjects for integrating learning with the life of the community, dialectology should have its respected place among them.

To exploit these teaching-learning potentialities, a course at Georgia State University, Atlanta, titled Social Dialects and Language Learning is attempting to make some contributions to the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States Project (LAGS) and, at the same time, to realize practical applications of dialectology in teacher education. This graduate elective course, taken primarily by English, reading, and elementary teachers, proposes the following objectives concerning language attitudes, skills, and knowledge:

(1) Inferences concerning the social, ethnic, and cultural significance of dialect differences should be based on careful observation of actual usage. That is to say, in McDavid's terms, <u>data</u> is not an obscene four letter word.

(2) Sensitivity to variations of speech reflecting geography, racial caste, social class, sex, age, and occupation should free the teacher of the right-wrong dichotomy and enable the teacher and students to make judgments about language usage on the basis of appropriateness for the occasion.

(3) The knowledge that usage is not fixed but changes and that it is not completely uniform, even at the most highly educated levels, should make untenable any claim to moral sanction for a particular usage.

(4) An application of knowledge of dialect variations should enable the teacher to deal more effectively with reading, writing, speaking, and listening problems of students.

(5) Recognizing that a person's language is an intimate possession, the teacher will encourage oral and written expression without censorship and will attempt to cultivate respect and admiration for the dialects of minority groups in the community.

The teachers taking this course have had an unusual opportunity to realize some of the foregoing objectives. This opportunity resulted from an invitation by Lee Pederson, Director of the Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States Project, to the class instructor and teachers to assist in developing urban vocabulary work sheets to supplement the LAGS work sheets by conducting interviews of native Atlantans. These work sheets, experimental and inventorial in nature, are now undergoing a second revision with a third round of use and refinement planned in the near future. The content of these work sheets, far from being intuitive in origin, derives largely from other Linguistic Atlas projects, particularly from the cultural outline of thirty-two categories established by Hans Kurath for the Linguistic Atlas of New England and the adaptations made from Kurath's work by Pederson for the Chicago work sheets used in his study The Pronunciation of English in Metropolitan Chicago.

Although the use of Linguistic Atlas work sheets as a frame of reference for urban vocabulary surveys has been criticized as not reflecting urban culture, actual data and theoretical considerations justify the use of the Linguistic Atlas framework. In terms of data being collected, the student fieldworkers in Atlanta are eliciting useful responses to most of the more than two-hundred items on the present

work sheets. From a theoretical view, native Atlanta informants should reflect rural cultural influences in their speech. The survey includes informants spanning four to five generations, giving a sampling of the Atlanta speech community as far back as the late 1880's. At that time the population of Atlanta was approximately fifty-thousand persons. Similar to other Southern cities to be investigated, the population growth of Atlanta has been substantially the result of in-migration from rural areas. According to United States census figures, as recently as the years of 1960 to 1965, fifty per cent of the population in-migration to Atlanta has been of rural Southern origin. Thus the demographic history of this city predicts a rural influence on the speech of Atlantans.

Classroom procedures and activities in the course were organized into five cumulative, related phases to engage the teachers in conducting useful fieldwork for the revision of the urban work sheets and in concurrently achieving major objectives of the course. These approaches are flexible and could be modified for use at various educational levels.

In the first phase of the work, teachers were asked to write a linguistic autobiography. How do a person's speech patterns come to be what they are? Members of the class speculated about the influence on their speech of such factors as their own birthplace, education, travel, and the occupation and education of relatives and close friends. Also, they considered their intellectual interests and travel as they speculated about regional and social aspects of their speech. Although most of the class members at this stage had little background for making an analysis of their linguistic behavior, the experience did pique their

curiosity. One teacher remarked, "I now feel a greater pride in my language heritage. I used to be ashamed of my speech." Another said, "I would like to be able to adapt to different social situations more readily."

The second phase of the work aimed at expanding the teachers' awareness of phonological, lexical, and grammatical contrasts in the idiolects of members of small groups formed in the class. One activity involved small groups reading set passages which included such contrasting regional features as the presence or loss of postvocalic /r/, difference or similarity among the stressed vowels of Mary, merry, and marry, the constrastive use of /u/ or /ju/ after /t,n,d/ in tune, news, dues, and the use of /z/ or /s/ in Mrs. In addition, groups of two interviewed each other using sections from the LAGS work sheets closely related in content to the experimental urban work sheets. This practice interviewing enabled individuals to anticipate some of the problems in actual interviewing situations and to read purposefully "Field Procedures: Instructions for Investigators, Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States" (McDavid, 1974). At this point they began to inquire about the types of informants they would be interviewing and how they would find these informants. The range and depth of questioning about language variations seemed to grow as evidenced in this tenth grade English teacher's troubled introspection: "I can accept many dialects intellectually, but emotionally I still believe there is a more or less correct way to speak."

Next came the preparation for the actual fieldwork. Instructional priorities and adequate sampling procedures had to be reconciled. Teach-

ers usually want to interview another teacher or their minister, priest, or rabbi. They seldom volunteer to interview a member of a different ethnic group. In order to insure that each person had the experience of interviewing an informant of another ethnic group, each member of the class was asked to complete two interviews: one with a white informant, another with a black informant. In a few instances, data collecting was incomplete and probably even inaccurate. However, the teachers believed the experience was worth the possible loss of data. In one instance, a ninety-three year old black woman stopped the white interviewer halfway through the questionnaire, saying, "I don't want to answer no more questions, but I like you to come visit me again."

Although not all interviews were pleasant experiences, the consensus of reactions to the fieldwork seems to be captured by the teacher who said, "I had the feeling of having visited a person I had known for many years." For teachers who usually talk too much in the classroom, the experience of listening more than talking is often an enlightening and wholesome discovery of how much other people know, especially unsophisticated folk.

What to do with the mountain of data was the next problem. Two classes at the time of this writing had conducted a total of 101 interviews in Atlanta using questionnaires listing 214 items. Each informant had given an average of approximately four responses to each item, counting both active and passive responses. An active response is a synonym the informant actually gave; a passive response is a synonym the informant had heard but did not use. The data to be dealt with consisted of about 86,000 lexical items.

Since the questionnaires were coded by social class, race, age, and sex, the teachers agreed that we could quickly sort the questionnaires into these categories. Each person had become more sensitive to vocabulary variations between black and white informants since each class member had interviewed informants from these two groups. Thus it was agreed to separate the questionnaires in turn by racial, social, age and sex groups; scan each set of questionnaires to identify certain lexical items which seemed to elicit different responses rather consistently; then actually count the number of responses for each of these selected items.

To determine whether the data supported vocabulary variation by social classes, the teachers selected the semantic category of "important neighborhoods." For example, Buttermilk Bottom (Table 1) is the name of a black ghetto that has been almost completely replaced by an urban renewal project known as Bedford Pines. West Paces Ferry is the name of a white upper class neighborhood; Rococola denotes a part of the same community so called because of the ornate mansions built by executives of the Coca Cola Company. A white ghetto of Atlanta is known as Cabbage Town and sometimes more generally as Grant Park. A count of active and passive responses (passive responses are indicated in parentheses) showed a familiarity with place names strongly associated with social class. As indicated in Table 1, only two lower class informants use the upper middle-class neighborhood place name West Paces Ferry, although sixteen had heard the term; fifteen lower middle-class informants use the term; and twenty-five upper middle-class informants

use the term. One strange inconsistency is the relatively large number of lower middle-class and upper middle-class informants who knew the lower class neighborhood place name Buttermilk Bottom. Several interviewers suggested that the recent popularity in Atlanta of a folk song titled "Buttermilk Bottom" might be an explanation of this familiarity with the term.

Table 1. Vocabulary Variation by Social Class.

| Lexical Items | Lower Class | Lower Middle Class | Upper Middle Class |
|---|---|---|---|
| Buttermilk Bottom | 6 (8) | 2 (4) | 0 (5) |
| Bedford Pines | 10 (5) | 9 (5) | 15 (14) |
| West Paces Ferry | 2 (16) | 15 (10) | 25 (0) |
| Rococola | 0 (0) | 0 (2) | 3 (7) |
| Cabbage Town | 9 (4) | 5 (12) | 2 (3) |
| Grant Park | 5 (3) | 12 (9) | 21 (4) |

The semantic categories of social parties, hair styles, and food (Table 2) are representative of many that showed vocabulary variation by racial caste. Beyond organizing the data, the teachers were encouraged to speculate about the meaning of the information gathered. Why does hoedown show up so strongly in both the black and white passive vocabularies? Several students suggested the data reflect the impact of the popular television show Hee Haw. Shine bones and pig feet occur much more frequently in the active vocabulary of the black informants while pork chops occurs more frequently in the active vocabulary of the white informants. Shine bones and pig feet are meats common in many black family diets; whereas, pork chops, a more expensive cut of meat, is common in the diet of many white families. Table 2 summarizes some of the semantic categories that were found to vary by racial caste.

Table 2. Vocabulary Variation by Racial Caste

| Lexical Items | Black Informants | White Informants |
|---|---|---|
| Social party | | |
| party | 24 (20) | 44 (0) |
| gig | 43 (7) | 6 (24) |
| hoedown | 3 (32) | 20 (25) |
| Hair styles | | |
| fro | 49 (0) | 11 (31) |
| bun | 8 (20) | 20 (22) |
| Food | | |
| pork chops | 20 (16) | 41 (0) |
| shine bones | 26 (17) | 5 (12) |
| pig feet | 28 (11) | 9 (20) |

Semantic categories selected for the purpose of examining vocabulary variation by age (Table 3) are houses and the black financial districts in Atlanta. The shot gun house and railroad house both designate a house of three or more rooms arranged in a row so that one could look through the front door and see out the back door. The dog trot house labels a house made up of two separate rooms joined together by a roof. The open space covered by a roof between the two rooms was used as a shelter for animals. As the term dog trot house has faded from the memory so has housing for the poor undergone change, if not improvement, in the urban environment.

The single passive response to the name Wheat Street reflects the economic history of Auburn Avenue. Wheat Street was renamed Auburn Avenue in 1893 at the request of citizens who wanted to give the street a more prestigious name. Auburn Avenue reached its zenith as the black financial center of Atlanta in the 1920's. During this time it was called "Sweet Auburn." In recent years, Auburn Avenue has deteriorated and

new black financial centers have arisen in the Cascade area and other areas as reflected by the vocabulary variation by age in Table 3.

Table 3. Vocabulary Variation by Age

| Lexical Items | >60 yrs. | 40-50 yrs. | 20-30 yrs. | <20 yrs. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Houses | | | | |
| shot gun house | 5 (14) | 2 (5) | 0 (4) | 0 (0) |
| railroad house | 3 (10) | 3 (4) | 0 (2) | 0 (0) |
| dog trot house | 2 (5) | 1 (3) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) |
| Black financial districts | | | | |
| Wheat Street | 0 (1) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) | 0 (0) |
| Auburn Avenue | 16 (5) | 10 (8) | 7 (10) | 5 (6) |
| "Sweet Auburn" | 7 (10) | 2 (7) | 1 (6) | 0 (8) |
| Cascade Area | 7 (12) | 15 (9) | 18 (4) | 20 (5) |

One of the more surprising outcomes of the survey to members of the class was the extent of vocabulary variation by sex. The semantic categories selected to investigate language variation between the sexes were food, pimp, and prostitute. Students speculated that the greater discrimination by females in naming foods, such as the use of specific terms for doughnuts, indicated greater interest in and knowledge of foods and cooking and the longtime relegation of women to pots, pans, and scrub brushes, as compared to the carefree male with his more gross discriminations in foods.

Speculation among the students concerning the variations in usage between men and women in the use of terms lady of the night and whore centered around the question of unequal status of men and women in American society. The preference of women for the expression lady of the night was viewed as an euphemistic disclaimer of a role they should not and would not have to play in a society in which they would have equality with men. Furthermore, it was argued that men in chosing the term whore were

expressing contempt for women and an attitude that some human beings are for the use of other more powerful individuals.

To summarize this approach to dialectology as a process of discovery, the procedures and activities involved the following sequence: (1) the discovery by individual teachers of some sources of their linguistic behavior, (2) the discovery of dialect contrasts in the speech of members of a small group, (3) the use of a questionnaire as an instrument for investigating the language usage of others, (4) the organizing and management of language data for investigating the variation of language in several dimensions, and (5) speculating about the causes of language variation in terms of historical, social, and psychological factors.

The preceding plan of instruction was subjected to experimental analysis. Two similar classes, a control group studying literature read by adolescents and an experimental group given the foregoing treatment, were post tested on the Black Intelligence Scale of Cultural Homogeneity (Williams, 1972). This instrument, a culture-specific test, measures knowledge of black English vocabulary and culture. Both groups were taught concurrently by this writer. Since the effect of the treatment on white teachers having limited exposure to black culture was of primary concern, the test scores for black teachers and for white teachers in the control group who had taught for two or more years in schools having twenty percent or more black students were subjected to separate analyses.

In Table 4, the statistics show that the white teachers in the experimental group who were exposed to the treatment differed significantly ($\alpha = .05$) from those in the control group, as was hypothesized. It was also hypothesized that black teachers would have higher mean scores as a group than white teachers and also would differ little between experimental and control groups. This hypothesis was supported, as can be seen in Table 4, with a t test that is not significant at the $\alpha = .05$ level.

Furthermore, the group of white teachers who were not given any treatment but had been teaching in integrated schools with a twenty per cent or higher black enrollment for two or more years did as well on the instrument as those whites in the experimental group who were exposed to the treatment.

Table 4. t TEST FOR EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

| | EXPERIMENTAL GROUP | | CONTROL GROUP |
|---|---|---|---|
| WHITES | $N = 21$<br>$\bar{X} = 65.05$<br>$SD = 7.12$ | $t^* = 4.69$<br>$df = 39$<br>critical t value for $\alpha = .05$ is 2.021 | $N = 20$<br>$\bar{X} = 55.3$<br>$SD = 6.16$ |
| BLACKS | $N = 6$<br>$\bar{X} = 84.33$<br>$SD = 5.05$ | $t = .269$<br>$df = 9$<br>critical t value for $\alpha = .05$ is 2.262 | $N = 5$<br>$\bar{X} = 82.64$<br>$SD = 14.89$ |
| WHITES IN 20%+ INTEGRATED SCHOOLS FOR TWO YRS+ | | | $N = 8$<br>$\bar{X} = 66.62$<br>$SD = 4.53$ |

Since the cell means were unequal, an harmonic means analysis was used to derive an analysis of variance table (Winer, 1962). Again, the F ratio is significant for the main effect of the white teachers, not significant for the effect of the black teachers nor for the black/white interaction as shown in Table 5. Thus the experimental evidence supports the conclusion that white teachers having limited exposure to black culture did improve significantly in their knowledge of black English vocabulary and culture as a result of a course emphasizing dialect fieldwork.

Table 5. HARMONIC MEANS ANALYSIS

| SOURCE OF VARIATION | SS | DF | MS | F .05, 1, 48 = 4.04 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A (White teachers) | 5285.88 | 1 | 5285.88 | 37.44 |
| B (Black teachers) | 156.96 | 1 | 156.96 | 1.11 |
| AB (Interaction) | 54.89 | 1 | 54.89 | .39 |
| ERROR (Within Cell) | 6776.69 | 48 | 141.18 | |

Furthermore, previously cited personal remarks of teachers during the course demonstrated a growing awareness of language variation across several dimensions and an increasing respect for dialect differences. Whether these changes will affect the teachers' performance in the classroom remains unanswered. But the promise is hopeful and exciting. Teachers showing respect, even admiration, for the speech of all students in their classes, may provide one of the most promising ways of combatting language prejudice by affecting the attitudes of the next generation of adults.

References

McDavid, Raven I. Jr. "Field Procedures: Instructions for Investigators, Linguistic Atlas of the Gulf States," A Manual for Dialect Research in the Southern States. Edited by Lee Pederson et. al. University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1974, pp. 35-57.

McDavid, Raven I. Jr. "Dialectology: Where Linguistics Meets the People," The Emory University Quarterly, VOL XXIII, No. 4, 1967, pp. 203-221.

Williams, Robert L. The Bitch-100: A Culture-Specific Test. Washington University, St. Louis, 1972.

Winer, B.J. Statistical Principles in Experimental Design. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1962, pp. 96-104.